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## INFORMATION REPORT INFORMATION REPORT

## CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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COUNTRY	USSR (Komi ASSR)	REPORT	
SUBJECT	1. Vorkuta Coal Mines 2. Conditions in the Vorkuta Forced Labor Camps	DATE DISTR.	21 December 1956
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SOURCE EVALUATIONS ARE DEFINITIVE. APPRAISAL OF CONTENT IS TENTATIVE.

1. [redacted] report [redacted] containing information on the Vorkuta coal mines and conditions in the Vorkuta forced labor camps.
2. The report discusses in considerable detail the following topics:
  - a. Importance of the Vorkuta coal deposits.
  - b. Transportation and industrial facilities in the area.
  - c. Production statistics.
  - d. Administration.
  - e. Geological conditions and other obstacles to be overcome in sinking the mine shafts.
  - f. Types of mining machinery used.
  - g. Established norms.
  - h. Treatment of prisoners, including clothing and food allowances, medical treatment wages, entertainment, and communication with the outside world.
  - i. Categories of workers.
  - j. Vorkuta strikes in 1953.
  - k. "Comrade Courts," created in December 1954.

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(Note: Washington distribution indicated by "X"; Field distribution by "#".)

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1.

H.H. Bennett

October 1951 - March 1955

Vorkuta has the youngest and northernmost coal deposits in the Soviet Union.

Development of the area was a result of the loss of Donets Basin coal production during German occupation and inadequacy of Moscow Basin production. In 1954 Vorkuta produced 10% of <sup>total</sup> Soviet coal production.

Only 15% of the Vorkuta deposits have been opened for exploitation.

Vorkuta is connected with the internal transportation network by the 1700 km

long Pechora Line. No other ~~trans-~~ <sup>trans-</sup>

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portation facility connects Vorbuta with the north. The tundra is barely passable because of bogs. 10000 of prisoners died during construction of the Pechora line from Inta to Vorbuta. Inta is <sup>at</sup> the northern edge of the forest region. Vorbuta coal deposits begin about 50 km north of <sup>the city of</sup> Vorbuta & ~~extend~~ end north of Inta. Branch railroad lines have been built or are planned to reach the eastern & western extensions of the deposits.

A line was built from Vorbuta to Yum-Yaga (NKI-28, E61-59) 40 km east of Vorbuta, where a number of shafts will be opened

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Those being constructed ~~in~~ have  
started production or should be in full  
production ~~by~~<sup>in</sup> 1956. Some of the  
other shafts, No. 8 for example

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one of the oldest Vorkuta shafts,  
will be exhausted by May 1956.

The 12<sup>th</sup> shaft produces 1,250,000

tons annually, & is the only capital  
shaft in Vorkuta area. The Soviets

define a capital shaft as one pro-  
ducing more than 1 million tons yearly.

#12, smallest in the area, produces

140,000 T annually. Average shaft

production is 300-500,000 T. 1953

production was said to amount to

10,150,000 T. Because of the strikes

in ~~the~~ July & August, & ~~gradual~~ <sup>slow</sup>

resumption of production, the

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1953 production ~~figure~~ suffered.

The Vorobta area is administered by the Vorobta Coal Combine, which was under the MVD until January 1954, and was headed by an MVD colonel.

The Ministry of the Coal Industry

gave mining advice until January 1954, when it ~~became responsible~~ took over the

Vorobta Coal Combine. MVD officials

~~until 1952, coal was mined by army~~ men replaced by civil officials.

shafts with ~~low~~ production, & those

in outlying districts, are combined under one ~~into~~ shaft administration. Shaft

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~~Due~~ the driving of galleries often ran  
into ~~the~~ geological difficulties <sup>and</sup> pro-  
duction suffered, since the mining  
brigades moved ahead too fast to permit  
the gallery brigades to prepare the  
galleries adequately. In the new  
shafts, the shaft & main galleries  
were completed before mining began.  
Since ~~the~~ stone in the Volanta area  
is soft & crumbly, galleries often  
collapse; our main galleries ~~are~~ <sup>are</sup> supported  
~~by~~ with wood, and only the shaft  
itself is made of bricks & cement.  
Mining is further hampered by floods.



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In Shaft Administration II area, also called the northern region, ~~the~~ ~~50 percent~~ main seams lie under the Ural River, and 50 percent of the seams are wet. Volnuta shafts ~~contain~~ contain a lot of gas, and shafts Nos. 12 and 14 have a gas concentration of 3.5 to 4.5 percent, more gas than any other shafts in the USSR. ~~although~~ ~~the~~ <sup>specify</sup> Soviet safety regulations ~~that~~ that dynamite is not to be used in the presence of a gas concentration of 2.5 percent, dynamite is used anyway.

Mining in the Volnuta area was

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primitive for ~~a~~ a long time because of transportation difficulties & general lack of mechanical equipment in the USSR. In 1951 only the 1st & 5th shafts used fully mechanical methods. In flat seams, such as those in the north region, 4 men mined the coal while 15 ~~carried~~ <sup>carried</sup> the coal <sup>150 meters</sup> to the ~~the~~ wagons. Now-a-days even the smallest shafts have shaking chutes and conveyor belts. While dynamite was used extensively in 1951, almost 30 percent of the mining is now done with the <sup>Dombas</sup> machine. In

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shafts not using this machine,  
two types of ~~two~~ KEMPE coal augers were  
used. ~~The~~ Kempe machine is  
extremely rugged and efficient. Type  
I cuts ~~one~~ meter of coal at a time, and  
Type II cuts 1.65 meters at a time.  
Supports are ~~mostly~~ mostly wood-  
steel props ~~are~~ occasionally ~~are~~  
used in the 1st & 5th pits. Wood  
comes primarily from Khor Oblast and the  
Mordov ASSR. Delay in delivery of  
wood often occurs because of trans-  
port & weather ~~problems~~ difficulties.  
The ~~one~~ <sup>single</sup> trade is inadequate to

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supply sufficient wood. In the  
1953-1954 winter of /, production  
often halted for days for lack of wood.  
In the pits, wagons of with a capacity  
of one ton were used. Until 1950,  
the wagons were pulled by hand;  
after 1950 electric tractors were  
used. Horses were not used for pulling  
the wagons.

Each the Vorobeyev, coal is said  
to lie in six seams, reaching a maxi-  
mum depth of 1200 meters. All  
pits are working on the second or  
third seams, with the maximum depth

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reached is 400 meters. Pits on the  
edge of the field have <sup>narrow</sup> seams. ~~of rather~~

~~These pits are~~ seams of the 12<sup>th</sup>

14<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> ~~pits~~ mines were only

80 cm to 1.2 meters wide, ~~whereas~~ <sup>whereas</sup>

the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> pits have

seams 3-4.5<sup>th</sup> meters wide. The

12<sup>th</sup> & 14<sup>th</sup> pits are mining the

third seam, which has a width of

only 35 to 40 centimeters. This coal

is said to be of special quality and  
~~is particularly valuable~~

it is shipped apart from the other

coal. The <sup>third</sup> seam floods often,

& the workers are always in danger.

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Working norms vary according to the size of the seam, geological conditions, and mining methods. In combined

Drummers & cager ~~methods~~ methods, <sup>in the</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> pit,

The norm for production from a seam

80 cm in width, ~~and the~~ is 6.2 T

per man. In a brigade of 25 men,

there are 3 mechanics, 4 carpenters,

a brigade leader, and an electrician.

The norm of 155 T. to be produced

by the brigade actually was produced

by 16 men. <sup>at the same</sup> In a seam 35 to 40

cm ~~high~~ <sup>high</sup>, the norm per man

in an eight-hour shift was 1.5 T.

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The brigade consisted of ~~11 men~~ <sup>11 men, including</sup>  
3 mechanics, 2 carpenters, ~~the~~ brigade  
leader, and an electrician. Actual  
~~production for the~~ production by the  
4 men ~~being engaged in~~ ~~work~~ was  
therefore 4.1 T, not 1.5. It was  
impossible to achieve the norm  
in this mine. The brigade contin-  
ually achieved 50% of the norm,  
& received punishment rations. In  
work with the combine, the norm  
was 16 T. Norms were ~~checked~~ <sup>checked</sup>  
every 3 months by the mine  
administration, & if changes in

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conditions had occurred, the section leader could request a change in the norm. Norms have tended to increase over the last few years. In 1951 the brigade in the 12<sup>th</sup> shaft had a norm of 5.4T, + in 1955 9.6T. Since norms usually were fulfilled, because of reduction of sentence for overfulfillment, & pay, ~~production~~ increased.

For 110% overfulfillment of norm, 2 days were deducted from a sentence, for 120+% - 3 days deducted.

In cases of continual overfulfillment,

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when the sentence is reduced already  
to  $\frac{2}{3}$ , the local MVD can direct  
release of a prisoner. As most  
 ~~Soviet~~  <sup>Soviet</sup> native prisoners are sentenced to  
10-15 years katorga, they double  
their efforts to reduce sentence,  
without realizing the effect on their  
health of this murderous tempo.  
Payment of prisoners was <sup>also</sup> introduced  
in regime camps in March 1952,  
after it had started in other camps  
at the end of the war. Prisoners  
received 40% of the wage paid  
free workers for the same work.

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With 100% norm fulfillment, a miner in the 12<sup>th</sup> pit receives 360 rubles ~~for~~<sup>per shift</sup> with 9.6t tons at 26 working days. Thus he receives 1.4 rubles per ton. Free workers receive 900 rubles for the same work, plus a place differential of 50%, making a monthly salary of 1,350 rubles. The other 60% of the prisoner's wages goes to the state. 3 years before release, 10% is deposited in a special release fund, which is paid the prisoner when he is released. For the 60% of his

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wages which is withheld, the prisoner receives from the MVD administration.

### Clothing —

- 1 quilted jacket, 1 pair quilted trousers every 2 years
- 1 cloth jacket, 1 pair cloth trousers every year
- 1 pair composition shoes every 2 years
- 1 pair underwear every 6 months
- 2 pairs foot rag & 2 handkerchiefs per year
- 1 quilted wrap, one blanket, 1 mattress every 4 years.

Housing in a barrack 14 x 6 meters, with 80-100 men per barrack.

Food consisting daily of —

500 g bread, 60 g fish, 30 g meat, 150 g of millet, oats, or barley broth, 1500 g of cabbage soup, 11 g of fats & 30 g sugar.

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Treatment in case of illness.

Since camps had to support themselves, with nothing from the MVD, the withholding from previous salaries also paid salaries + allowances of the inflated MVD force. Pay of free mines seems high at first glance, but one must consider prices in the ~~priced zone~~ ~~priced zone~~, above all for fresh vegetables + fruits, which are paid out of proportion -

1 kg butter	3.2 R
1 kg rye bread	1.5 R
1 kg sausage (second quality)	2.8 R
1 kg apples	8 R
1 kg also	1.8 R

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1 kg gran. sugar	12 R
1 m. gloves	350 R
1 sport shirt	90
1 suit, medium quality	800-1000 R

Miners don't receive free coal. Bought in small quantities, coal costs 82 R per ton. Because of the polar climate, this is a real strain.

Free workers pay 140-160 R monthly for a 1/2 room dwelling, without bath.

The common miner therefore is not in a very good position. Higher jobs receive more — chief of the dynamite crew receives 80 rubles

per shift x 26 shifts = 2,080

R monthly + 50% polar differential =

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## Sanitation & Accident Prevention

1. Underground mines for heavy work

2. " " " " " light "

3. surface workers

The categorizing commission meets  
three annually - June & December.

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The commission is made up of imprisoned doctors, under direction of a military or former civilian doctor. The decision of the commission is final. A change of category can occur only at the next meeting of the commission or after a period of inability to work. In accidents, the prisoner is not put on the sicklist, unless his section chief issues him a certificate that he was injured in an on-the-job accident, not his own fault. Since each accident lowers the safety premium of the section leader, a certificate is issued only

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where life is endangered or bones are broken. Treatment varies according to the ability of medical personnel & equipment. In the 4 pits of the north region, (pit 29, pit administration 2, pit 7, & the TES), with 15,000 prisoners, there was only 1 X-ray machine - in pit 7. Accident prevention laws are strict & prescribe drastic punishment, but were obeyed only when a commission from Moscow was expected. Altho dynamite is forbidden in mines with certain gas content, dynamite was used anyway with full

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knowledge of authorities. Remarkable that  
no catastrophe occurred — in 1954 an  
coal dust  
explosion finally occurred — killing 25  
prisoners. Pit Administration II, with  
1500 men underground, had 7 <sup>fatal</sup> accidents  
in ~~1950~~ + 90 accidents involving  
hospitalizations in 1954.

Leave is a word unknown to prisoner  
miners until 1953. One improvement  
after the big strike of July - Aug 53  
gave underground workers up to a  
month's leave in special barracks,  
without pay, on special rations, if  
they had a ~~yearly~~ average of over 100%.

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fulfilment of norms. Indigent prisoners receiving visits from parents, wives, or children could get 10-day unpaid leave to spend in special barracks with their relatives.

In late 54 Vorbata had about 45 camps, totalling 100,000 prisoners. Maximum number reached 125,000 in summer 1952.

Camps were either regime (R) or Vorbata (V). Regime camps (about 35) were directly under MGB, while Vorbata camps were under Komi ASSR MVD.

All camps in the Vorbata area were under Guards Maj. Gen. Deremenko, who

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was also commander of MVD security

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troops. Prisoners in the Volunta camps were mostly criminals or political prisoners with short sentences. They always had wages, reduction of sentence for non-fulfilment, unlimited correspondence rights, passes to leave the camps, & open barracks at night - practically a free life. Regime prisoners however, mostly Soviet citizens convicted with the German army, were sentenced to 10-15 years katorga. Another group were those from the western USSR who actually fought <sup>agitated</sup> against the ~~forces~~. ~~agitated~~

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Third & smallest was the foreign group -  
about 3000 people. The latter 2 groups  
were sentenced to 25 years as "isolated"  
prisoners (yablyudimny). In contrast  
with Vorkuta camps, strict discipline  
prevailed in regime camps - from 2200  
to 0500 barracks were closed, prisoners  
could write letters twice a year, & there  
was no ~~work~~ wage, reduction of sentence  
for moral fulfillment, visits from  
relatives, or passes out of camp.

Beginning in 1952, conditions in  
the Vorkuta ~~camps~~ <sup>area</sup> became ~~less~~ <sup>more</sup> strict.

After the July-August 3 strikes there

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conditions in Regime camps resembled those of Vorluta camps. Various amnesties freed the prisoners, limited release to live freely in the area, living outside the camp area ~~and~~ (daily reporting), shows that the area gradually was changing into an exile area. Prisoners forced to spend another 10 years in the foggy zone far from their families still weren't satisfied. They wanted to go home or to the Baltic <sup>countries</sup> & Western Ukraine. The Vorluta Coal Combine worried about its best workers & the plan,

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so they tried to solve the problem by recruiting strenuously in Moscow, Leningrad, Gorky, & Kiev, with the result that thousands came up to Vorshita, were promised heaven on earth, spent a few weeks in the murderous climate, & disappeared with the wind.

Prisons & camps in European USSR were then ~~emptied~~ <sup>emptied</sup> & the prisoners were sent to Vorshita, refused to go underground, were driven below at gunpoint, & went on sitdown strikes. Release of foreigners did the greatest damage to the Kombinat's plan,

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as they had been the machinists & other key people, almost impossible to replace. Transformation of Urobata into an elite area brought financial problems as well, as mining by free workers made coal considerably more expensive. The Politburo will solve this problem by presenting the Supreme Soviet of the Komi ASSR the proposal of paying miners a polar differential only after 5 years residence in the area. So the free workers, the only satisfied group in the area are starting to grumble.

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All camps in the Vorkuta area  
are ~~divided~~ <sup>separate</sup> into 3 zones, ~~separate~~

~~for the first zone~~ The first zone, the  
regime zone, is no different from  
the punishment camps - same con-  
ditions persist as during the Beria  
era. The second zone, the "limited  
zone" (restricted) is inside the camp  
area, & like the regime zone, surround-  
ed by a 2-meter high barbed-  
wire fence with watchtowers.

Prisoners in ~~the~~ the limited zone  
can get passes to leave the area,  
& move freely 4-8 hours in a specified

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area. They can visit restaurants & make purchases stores in the free settlements, which are close to the mine camps.

The rule against visiting "free" homes usually isn't carried out, & the MVD usually winks at violations of the rule. Some prisoners of the outer, limited area, receive permission to visit Varmita, capital of the area, with its 70,000 inhabitants.

In the third zone, "free" zone, are prisoners whose sentences have been reduced  $\frac{2}{3}$ . This zone lies outside the real camp area, but has

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the same sort of barracks.

These prisoners live just like the  
koles in the area, & may not leave  
the area. This free zone (restricted  
zone) extends from about 40 km  
north of the city of Vorobuta to the  
station at Shum ~~35~~ 35 km  
south of Vorobuta. They may not  
select their jobs, but are placed by  
the plan section of the camp  
administration; they receive 90 % of  
~~the~~ wages paid free workers, but  
without the paler differential.

With permission of the camp ad-

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ministration, they may have their families join them. These improved conditions are a result of the strikes of July - Aug 53, which followed news of Benjas removal from office.

In the north rayon, mines 7, 12, 14, 29, 16, the TES construction camp, + cement factory struck en masse.

In this rayon alone, the strikers numbered 15,000. The high point of ~~the~~ strike was 25 July - 1 August. For the first time the government had to hear the ~~the~~ demands of the

prisoners - MVD minister Army Gen.

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Maslennikov was the govt representative.  
The attempt to put down the strike  
with weapons was not fully successful.  
In camps 12-14-16, 3 deaths, in camp  
29 - 60 deaths. In spite of feverish  
work by the MVD/KGB, it was not  
possible to ferret out the strike  
leaders in the various camps.  
Unfortunately, front men fell victim  
to the informant system <sup>a few</sup> & were  
~~not~~ sentenced to long terms in  
penitentiaries. Promises made them  
by the govt were only hesitantly  
fulfilled. The 3-zone system

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for Soviet prisoners owes a lot to the German prisoners who started laying down their tools individually in Nov. Dec 54, & could not be forced by any means to resume work. As this movement attracted sympathy & followers among other nationalities, the anchorations of the 3-zone system were instituted, to prevent rebirth of the strikes of 1953. After Berling's fall, prisoners noted an obvious feeling of uncertainty on the MVD. A higher official didn't know if the directions

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he gave ~~every~~ one day

would be countermanded the next  
by his superiors. In 1952, shirkers  
could still be punished with up to  
3 months isolation (camp prison on  
reduced rations), & ~~a~~ chronic cases  
with the strait jacket; a limit  
of 7 days isolation was set in the  
new regulations of 1 Sept 1953.

In habitual offender cases, a  
camp chief referred the case to  
superior authorities, who held  
court on the case & sentenced  
the habitual offender to punishment.

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Prisoners no longer fear punishment  
camps or solitary, as conditions in  
those have improved. No longer  
is there a punishment ration in  
solitary - 300 g bread & 1000 g soup,  
instead, the same food as for  
non-workers which = that of  
workers - 100 g bread & 10 g fats,  
& the person in solitary must be  
furnished mattress & blanket.  
Camp leaders fear that prisoners  
will report to superior authorities  
on the general corruption of MVD  
camp officials so they usually

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prisoners only with 7 days  
solitary. In camps 12-14-16,  
the 18 Germans there did no work  
after January, & no report was  
made to the MVD or Vorhuta  
camp administration. The camp  
chief prescribed solitary up to 8  
times for one person, a situation  
resolved by repatriation of the German.

An innovation introduced in  
Dec. 14 was the "Comrade counts,"  
composed of prisoners working for  
the MVD, with a few of the  
best workers added to give it a

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touch of legitimacy. Members were recommended by the political officer & were elected in "public & free" camp meetings. The comrade courts advised the camp administration on punishment of prisoners & judged the prisoners committing crimes in the limited & free zones.

In Dec. 53, Novyy Sever had an article on Vorobita by the CCCPSU, depicting the "heroic role" of Kom-somal brigades in exploitation of mines & construction of the city of Vorobita. No Komsovetets has

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lifted a shovel in the Vorbata area, tho many have served in the watch towers. The city of Vorbata was built on the bones of thousands of political prisoners.

In summer 1954 troupes came from Leningrad to put on plays in Vorbata. The troupe asserted that conditions were better in Vorbata than Leningrad. They bought a lot of materials & textiles which they could not get in such ~~good~~ quality or ~~as much~~ variety in Leningrad. A sign that things were better

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for prisoners than their relatives,  
was that prisoners sent money +  
packages to their relatives.

Prisoners have lost the faculty for  
independent thought. Exceptions were  
the intelligentsia + certain national  
groups, ~~especially~~ Latvians + Lithuanians.

A corollary is the inability to  
take independent action. E.g. -  
the law states that every 7<sup>th</sup> day  
is a holiday if the norm is filled,  
but the mine heads always tried to  
use the 7<sup>th</sup> day for overfulfilment.

3 Germans struck once when this

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happened, against protests of the other monks, & were arrested, but later were treated as heroes. When the mine chiefs repeated this lousy trick, half the mine force struck, & on the ~~next~~ <sup>next</sup> recurrence of the attempt, the entire mine force struck.

All Radio stations were heard, tho it was never discussed openly.

Letter communications to West Germany went on through free prisoners, & did not go through the censor.

Airmail took 8 days going & 10

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days back.

On the big strike in 1953, the  
prisoners talked a lot about MVD  
participation in the strike. In fact  
MVD officers accompanied wood  
shipments from the Kirov area, &  
asked on their arrival what in  
the world was wrong that Vorobita  
was not on strike. Another sign  
was the fact that MVD people worked  
themselves into strike committees.

A Col. Klesnikov, aviator & HSO,  
imprisoned in 1952, was a contra-  
versial figure & Lt. Col. Gurnick,

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former MVD officer [redacted] disappeared after  
the strike. He was supposed to  
have been sentenced to 10 years in  
Ausk, but no one believed that.

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